Review of Cadwallon

Cadwallon Review Summary

Affiliated Capsule Review
August 7, 2006

by: Xenon_Wulf

Style: 5 (Excellent!)
Substance: 3 (Average)

Rackham's entry into the RPG market. A breath of fresh air? Maybe not, but something different, for certain.

*Xenon_Wulf has written **1 reviews**, with average style of 5.00 and average substance of 3.00*

*This review has been read **23493** times.*

Cadwallon Product Summary

Name: Cadwallon
Publisher: Rackham
System: Cadwallon
Setting: Confrontation
Author: Xavier Spinat
Category: RPG

Cost: 49,49 EUR
Pages: 349
Year: 2006

SKU: 01
ISBN: 2915556385

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Warning: imagecreatefromstring(): Empty string or invalid image in **/opt/rpgnet-deploys/20250918113632/slib/piclib.php** on line **387**

Warning: imagejpeg(/var/www/rpgnet/pictures/cache/picthumb7449-medium.jpg): failed to open stream: No such file or directory in **/opt/rpgnet-deploys/20250918113632/slib/piclib.php** on line **439**

I'd just like to start off by saying that I've done some freelance work on the English version of this book, but that I still had to buy my copy of the game in french (so yes, there is some bias, but not as much as if it had been a free copy).

Now that this is out of the way, I would like to state that I'm reviewing the French edition, and that the English one will be released at Gencon.

The first thing to catch the eye about this book, other than its size (at slightly over

345 pages and hardcover, it's hard to miss), is quality of the art. Once again, Rackham shows off its strong point. A beautiful cover of adventurers being surprised while eavesdropping, and the interior is, as should be expected, filled with beautiful color art, some astounding black and white work (by none other than Gary Chalk), and the artwork of the Rackham gaming tiles as background on a number of pages (I was less pleased by that, but the rest of the artwork more than makes up for it). The artists who have contributed to art in the book are well known: Paul Bonner, Gary Chalk, John Howe, Edouard Guiton, Paolo Parente, among others.

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Once the shock from such beautiful art has passed, one gets a less pleasing shock - Rackham has comitted a most serious offense: they've forgotten to do an index. There's a quick listing of the chapters, their main sections and which page they're on, but nothing detailed. Unfortunately, the book itself is somewhat overly wordy, making it confusing to read.

The book is divided into three main parts (setting, character creation, game mechanics) and the annexes (containing equipment tables and character sheets).

Part 1 - Setting After a quick introduction (the classic "what's a roleplaying game") and a quick glance at game mechanics (another point which irked me was that the basic mechanics were explained here, on page 9, while game mechanics, over 100 pages later, were referring to these), the book moves on to describe the setting.

Cadwallon is a city founded by a mercenary company, and has always been free from the politics of the nations surrounding it, nations which have been slowly entering a massive war, the Rag'narok. The city is divided into 11 fiefdoms, each of which is described, along with places of interest in each and a few of the movers and shakers of each area.

The artwork here is as lavish as always, with some of the points of interest being drawn. A number of possible roleplaying hooks have been included in the text in each fiefdom - the descriptions bring the city to life and cannot help but give ideas to a crafty GM.

This part also explains the laws of the city, its holidays, how the politics work in the city.

Part 2 - Character creation This part starts by taking the reader through some of the game terms and the breakdown of a round, everything explained rather clearly and with examples. Lack of a glossary for quick-reference is felt, though. It then moves on to character creation, which feels different from most games I've seen until now.

Characters do not have stats, but "attitudes" (PUGnacity, STYle, SLEight, OPPortunism, DIScipline SUBtlety), which are all at "2" at the beginning of chargen, but increase according to race and culture. The races are classic fantasy fare (Elves, Dwarves, Humans, Goblins, Orcs, Ogres, Wolfen) and the cultures (which are basically which culture your character grew up in, influencing his outlook on life) are also somewhat common. They are divided in three main groups: Light, Destiny (neutrality) and Darkness. The cultures of Light include a culture of religious fanatics, another one of brave and daring knights, and so on, while those of Darkness include a culture of necromancers, and another of mad geneticists.

Once a race and culture are chosen for the character, increasing some of his attitudes and giving him a couple

of starting skills, the player gets to pick three "trade" ranks. These are basically the job or jobs the character has had before starting on his life of adventure. Each trade can go up to 6 ranks, thus making it possible to have a starting character with three ranks in a single trade, or one rank in three different trades.

There are a total of 37 trades, split among six broad groups: Confrontation trades (jobs dealing with fighting and killing stuff), Exploration trades (jobs that have to do with moving around, a number of rogue-types are in this category), Interaction trades (jobs that have something to do with being social and dealing with people), Incantation trades (magic-users), Divination trades (priests and servants of various faiths), Revolution trades (jobs that have something to do with inventing/making things or technology). Each rank of trade gives some skills, a bit of equipment and some money.

Purchasing equipment (the tables for which are only in the annex, and for which there are very little descriptions) and selecting a second distinctive feature (the first one is given by the race and modified by the culture).

Distinctive features are roughly the equivalent of feats in D&D - cool advantages that can always help, but which have a drawback. For example the "Parry" distinctive feature has the advantage that rolls of 1 are no longer failures when using a reaction to increase Defense, but the character must have Style as his favored attitude (I'll explain the mechanics later).

The character then gains a few points in some of the more common skills, a contact (an npc who can give him information, very much like Shadowrun), and then sent on his merry way.

The final section of this part of the book is a detailed explanation on the different skills available, and how they can be used as either actions or reactions or both. (Once again, I'll come back to this)

Part 3 - Game mechanics This is where the book is somewhat disappointing - the previous chapters allowed for a regular tabletop rpg, to be played without miniatures. This part is centered on using some form of map and minis for action "scenes". It is, on the other hand, very thourough, as there are rules on what characters can percieve, movement, obstacles, patrols and reserves. There's even a section on how NPCs will react depending on how much ruckus is being raised in the area. (This, I thought, was a nice touch - if players start being too rowdy, a "Threat Level" will rise, and, depending on its current amount, will cause npcs to react in a different manner, depending on their attitude, until the militia finally comes along to arrest the troublemakers).

Combat is the next part explained, and seems somewhat simple (I'll come back to it when explaining the game mechanics), yet effective. The only gripe I can have with it was the same I had with Shadowrun 3rd Ed - action declaration and resolution are not the same and each take place in a different phase, making combat a lengthier affair.

Rules for character interaction (how to convince and intimidate and so on) follow, with a quick write up of 67 NPCs which were named in the first part of the book and a rapid description of the various upper and lower guilds of the city.

The magic and miracles section (in that order) follow, each containing a large amount of spells or miracles, along with some extra information about the city.

The final section is the "revolution" section, which explains what mutagenic, herb-use, gunpowder, steam and naphta can create, when a skilled engineer (such as a PC) decides to go to town.

Explanation of game mechanics:

A character has a certain amount of dice each turn, which during action declaration he splits between two pools: Action pool and Reaction pool. Dice in the action pool are used when a character attempts an action, dice in the reaction pool are used when a character interrupts another character's action to intervene (trying to block or dodge a fighter's attack, trying to counter a magician's spell as he tries to cast it, etc.).

A character's pool is refreshed at the end of each turn by an amount of dice equivalent to his ranks in his two highest trades (which is called POTential), plus the amount of dice remaining in his largest pool. For example, say a character has three dice left in his Reaction pool, and one die left in his action pool, he'll get three dice plus his POT to split next turn.

The attitudes work in an interesting fashion: A character starts the game in a specific attitude selected by the player. During the game, a player may opt to change his character's attitude by burning half of his remaining dice pool at the end of a turn. So if the character from the previous example would wish to change attitude from say PUGnacious to SLEight, he'd burn half of his three dice from his Reaction pool, switch attitude, and add the remaining dice to his POT.

The mechanics for different tasks are quite simple - roll an amount of d6 equal to your skill level (to a max of dice equal to a character's action or reaction pool, depending on what is being attempted), take the highest result, add the score for the appropriate attitude, and check to see if it beats a difficulty level. If a character is in the attitude for the actual skill, he even gets either an extra die or a +1 to his final result. If a character were to try and hit an opponent with an axe, he'd use his Slash skill (let's make it 5). If he'd only have 3 dice in his action pool, he wouldn't be able to roll more than 3 dice, no matter what his skill level (this is where the bonus die from being in the appropriate attitude can come in handy). When reacting, the reaction roll will take place before the action roll, as its result will become the target difficulty for the action.

Taking the previous example of the character trying to hit someone with an axe. Say his target decided to react by blocking. Taking a certain amount of dice from his reaction pool, the character blocking makes his roll, with a final result of 7. The attacking character's target difficulty will now be 7, which he will roll against.

Damage rolls are simply a roll of as many d6 as the weapon used power, plus any damage modifier it may have, minus the target's protection.

Hit points are according to the size of a character and use health levels as well. A wolfen, for example, is a large creature (size 4) and thus has 4 hit points on each of its health levels (unhurt, lightly wounded, seriously wounded, critically wounded, incapacitated). The amount of hit points a character has cannot increase - they are a fixed amount.

It is possible to make more than one action or reaction during a turn, depending on how many dice are in the appropriate pool. Any action or reaction after the first will become more difficult, however.

There are a few more quirks, but all in all the system seems simple and solid enough. Those of you who have

fond memories of the old Fighting Fantasy book titled "The City of Thieves" would do well to take a look at this book - it'll definately get your attention for a while.

All in all, I'd give this book a 6/5 for style, and a 3/5 for substance, as I found it hard to follow at times (and french is my native tongue), the lack of index, and the editing problems I pointed out earlier.

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